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Fulfilling the Vision for SAE: A 30-Year Process

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Fulfilling the Vision for SAE: A 30-Year Process

Abstract

The early 1980's was a tumultuous time for education, and specifically agricultural education. President Reagan's A Nation at Risk report (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) raised concerns about educational preparation of American students. Declining profitability and international competition were affecting the agriculture economy and there was a laundry list of competing forces that were impacting the enrollment in secondary agricultural programs. These production agriculture and agricultural education challenges caused the U.S. Secretaries of Agriculture and Education to charge the National Research Council to study and make recommendations. As a result, in 1985, a committee on agricultural education in secondary schools was established to assess and make recommendations to maintain and improve agricultural productivity and competitiveness.

Disciplines

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Comments

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Fulfilling the Vision for SAE: A 30-Year Process

by Michael Retallick

The early 1980's was a tumultuous time for education, and specifically agricultural education. President Regan's *A Nation at Risk* report (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) raised concerns about educational preparation of American students. Declining profitability and international competition were affecting the agriculture economy and there was a laundry list of competing forces that were impacting the enrollment in secondary agricultural programs. These production agriculture and agricultural education challenges caused the U.S. Secretaries of Agriculture and Education to charge the National Research Council to study and make recommendations. As a result, in 1985, a committee on agricultural education in secondary schools was established to assess and make recommendations to maintain and improve agricultural productivity and competitiveness.

The committee's final report, which was titled *Understanding Agriculture: New Directions for Education* (National Research Council, 1988), was nicknamed the "Green Book." The report was an honest, but not very glowing, assessment of agricultural education. Declining enrollments, instructional content, lack of consistency among programs, and program quality were concerns. They concluded there was a need to adjust policy and perception of both agriculture and agricultural education to meet these challenges. The report

became a bellwether to reframe agricultural education nationally.

The committee suggested a transition from a focus on pure production-based vocational training to include agricultural literacy. They expanded the definition of agricultural education to include both vocational and literacy describing it as both education *in* and *about* agriculture. The *Green Book* provided the vision for expanding agricultural education — including SAE (Supervised Agricultural Experience).

The committee called for major revisions in the relevance and scope of SOE (Supervised Occupational Experience), as it was called at the time. The program needed to be more effective in the preparation of students for current and future career opportunities beyond traditional production agriculture. The committee recommended a goal that ALL students participate in worthwhile SOEs focused "on learning, with appreciation for earning" (National Research Council, 1988, p. 5).

for supervised experiences acquired through "land laboratories, agricultural mechanic laboratories, greenhouses, nurseries, and other facilities provided by the school" (National Research Council, 1988, p. 5). Extensive contact between student and teacher in a diverse portfolio of SOE opportunities was a quality factor to minimize uneven quality instruction within and across programs. The committee also acknowledged that 4-year SOE programs was the goal but noted that not all students needed SOE throughout their 4 years. Finally, while the *Green Book* didn't call for a change from SOE to SAE, it precipitated the discussion and the change.

Prior to and following the *Green Book*, researchers continued to study SAE. While supervised experience had an economic impact and educational value, there were issues. Among those issues were declining supervised experience participation because of changes in student demographics, school schedules, cuts to

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The *Green Book* articulated a vision of SOE that included an involved teacher, planned experiences, adequate resources, and student placement. Although segments of our profession still debate the legitimacy of using such facilities, the committee allowed

teachers' summer contracts, diminishing appreciation by school administrators, and additional expectations and pressures for agriculture teachers' time. These works continued the discussion regarding the implementation of

SAE which lead to educational materials for both local agricultural programs as well as agricultural teacher education. Among them was a SAE Handbook by Barrick, et al. (1992), National FFA's CD-ROM SAE Handbook (2006) SAE unit plans for agricultural teacher education (Barrick et al., 2015), and the Philosophy and Guiding Principles for the execution of the Supervised Agricultural Experience Component of the Total School Based Agricultural Education Program (National Council on Agricultural Education, 2015). These works had significant influence on the evolution of SAE and most recently culminated in the development of *SAE for All* (National Council on Agricultural Education, 2017).

SAE is defined as a **student-led, instructor supervised, work-based learning experience** that results in **measurable outcomes** within a predefined, agreed upon set of **Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) Technical Standards and Career Ready Practices** aligned to student **career plan** of study. *SAE for All* (Figure 1) begins with building awareness at the middle school level and continues through advanced levels for high school seniors. There are five foundational elements that are applicable to all students. Once students establish career-based goals and a focus via the foundational elements, there are opportunities for further enrichment and individualization through five types of immersion SAEs.

The foundational elements are essential skills and activities for all students and can be further developed no matter where they are at within the program (e.g.,

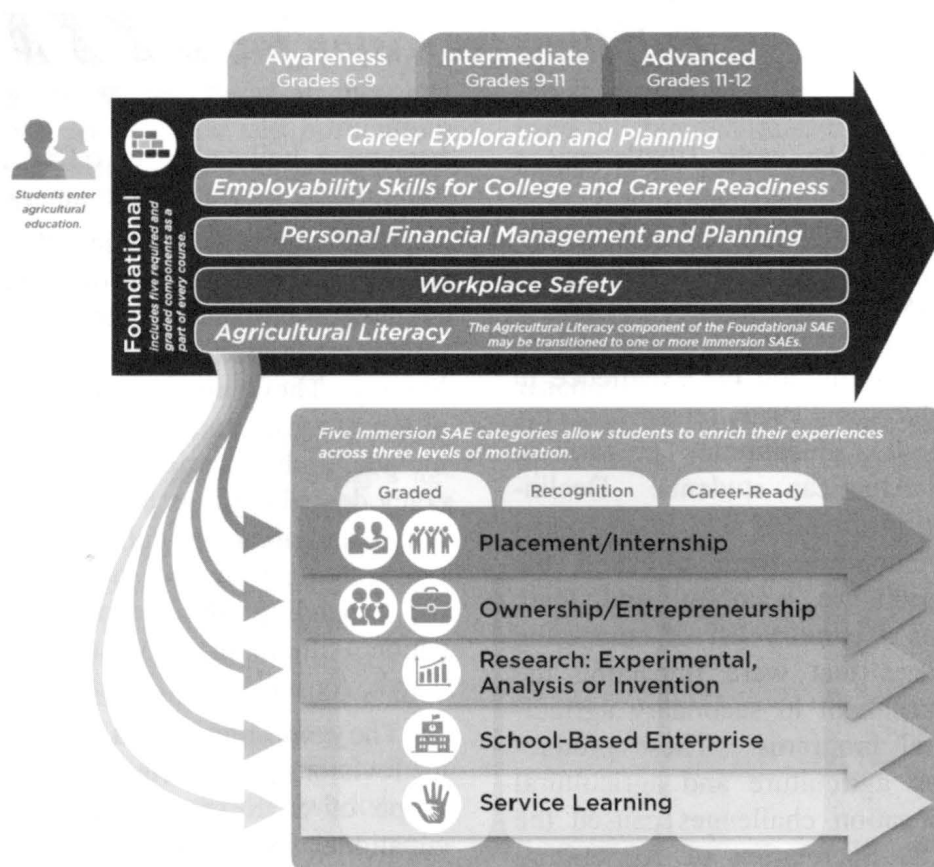


Figure 1. *SAE for All*

first semester freshman or last semester senior). It allows for easy entry and exit, can be applicable for students who enter the program for a single semester or for program completers, can be taught within a class or self-taught via the student handbook that was developed, which allows for *SAE for All* to be required for all students and graded as a part of every course.

The foundational elements of *SAE for All* situate agricultural education as a premier career and technical education program and addresses educational and societal issues that parents and lawmakers expect school districts to address. *SAE for All* includes purposeful career planning and exploration which is a requirement for most states and Perkin V's programs of study. It provides an authentic mechanism for students to plan, develop, and record employability

skills for college and career readiness. Personal financial management and planning is incorporated and addresses the national need for finance education. *SAE for All* also addresses workplace safety and the related labor laws, which is not only a concern regularly voiced by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Labor, but also employers. Finally, there is an element of agricultural literacy at the foundational level to address the need for a literate employee pool and society who has a basic understanding of the depth and breadth of the agricultural industry and the national food supply.

The immersion SAEs, for the most part, are similar to previous traditional types of SAE including placement/internships and ownership/entrepreneurship. However, it has been expanded to research (i.e., experimental, analysis, and

invention), school-based enterprise, and service learning. The Immersion SAE categories allow students to enrich their experiences across three levels of motivation – graded, recognitions and awards, and career-readiness. The immersion SAEs fit a broader range of student interests and provide a venue for all students to explore careers and interest while developing transferable skills to college and the workplace.

SAE for All has been adopted by the National Council for Agricultural Education and the related organizations. Funding and support have been secured for the training and in-service of state Team AgEd members in a train-the-trainer-fashion. Ag Experience Tracker (AET) and other state-approved recordkeeping systems are making changes to align with *SAE for All*. And, most importantly for many agriculture teachers, National FFA has committed to aligning the recognition and award systems to the elements of *SAE for All*.

In summary, it's been more than 30 years since the *Green Book* was published. It initiated an ongoing agricultural education discussion which has led to continual advancements in all areas including SAE. As I reflect on the most recent advancements with SAE, I believe we are closer than ever to achieving the vision of the committee who penned the *Green Book*. The pendulum has swung. The primary focus of SAE is on student learning and meeting the needs of ALL students who have interest in our agricultural programs. It will take ongoing and significant effort to continue to advance SAE. *SAE for All* addresses the practical challenges teachers

face daily as well as the primary educational mandates and societal issues around career planning, financial education, and workplace safety. All of this is in an effort to better prepare a more agriculturally informed generation of employees and consumers through our education *in* and *about* agriculture.

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